



PRORITY: Cultivate a robust, inclusive local economy with a diverse workforce and pipelines to jobs and education for all

BACKGROUND: Employment rates in Buncombe County are strong overall, at 3.4% as of July 2017 which is lower than state and national averages. Yet per capita income and average annual wage in Buncombe County is lower than the average in North Carolina and United States. While job growth has continued year over year, lower wage industries are leading growth so wages and income are lagging or stagnant. The growth a small high income group in Buncombe County is outpacing the state and nation while the number of people at the low end of the income spectrum is also on the rise. Disparities are pronounced in Buncombe County – African Americans have lower average monthly earnings and household incomes than white counterparts, are disproportionately impacted by poverty and unemployment, and own fewer businesses.

GOALS:

- Leverage economic development policy to broaden and diversify the development of new and expanded businesses and industries
- Invest in neighborhood and community-based jobs and education initiatives
- Engage in partnerships for innovative workforce models such as worker owned co-ops, apprenticeships and job skills training
- Support small business development with emphasis on historically underserved populations
- Implement practices for recruiting and maintaining a diverse, qualified workforce of Buncombe County employees

LEAD DEPARTMENTS: Community Engagement; Health and Human Services; Human Resources; Planning and Development; Strategic Partnerships

ACTIONS: The following is a summary of activities and investments by Buncombe County Government in support of the goals listed above.





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	<i>Completed/Ongoing</i>	<i>Proposed/Upcoming</i>
<i>Economic Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize economic development incentives and partnership with Economic Development Coalition to attract new and expanded businesses and jobs Capital support for Community College for job training/education, certificates, degrees Partnership with Workforce Development Board to provide policy, planning, oversight and funding for local workforce development programs and address workforce issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement updated economic development policy, which prioritizes incentives based on average wages, workforce diversity, sustainable business practices, and inclusion of Engage with community partners on next steps to respond to gaps identified in the Asheville Economic Leakage Study
<i>Neighborhood Based Initiatives</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Isaac Coleman Economic Community Investment program grants to 7 community groups engaging neighborhoods to increase jobs and self-sustaining businesses Funding Tipping Point Grants to support community efforts Community Engagement Team & Community Connectors working throughout county districts to link neighborhood projects Funding of job skills training program serving people that face barriers to employment 	
<i>Innovative Workforce Models</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> STEP employment and training program to increase opportunities for recipients of public benefits Participation in Economic Inclusion in Southern Cities consortium Funding to support living wage employer certification program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upskill WNC partnership to embed workforce supports in Justice Resource Center
<i>Small Business Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership of Diversity Supplier Network consortium to increase the work of equity and inclusion in the supply chain to strengthen historically underrepresented and minority owned businesses Funding of women’s business center providing small business development, technical assistance and access to capital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocation of funding to support Community Capital Loan Program to assist historically disadvantaged businesses with gaining access to capital and business support
<i>County Workforce</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner in Diversity Engagement Coalition to create connections, build capacity and promote diverse professionals Implementation of “ban the box” as an inclusive hiring strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing wages for lowest paid employees Request for Proposals for a vendor to conduct a salary study to assess pay and classification for County positions

